ZABRISKIE POINT

AND

CHRISTIAN BREVOORT ZABRISKIE

THE MAN

Keepsake No. 16
Published for the 27th Death Valley '49ers Encampment
November 11th to 14th, 1976
Death Valley, California

ZABRISKIE POINT

This portrait of Chris Zabriskie was made about 1888. He would have been 24 years old, living and working at the time in the remote mining camp of Candelaria nearly 150 miles north of Death Valley.

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The old 20-mule Team wagons, then parked at Death Valley Junction, provided a suitable backdrop for the touring officials. Left to right: Fred Corkhil, Jr., Pacific Coast Borax Co.; Howard H. Hayes, Riverside newspaper publisher and former Park Service concessionaire; Chris Zabriskie; Steve Mather, first Director of the National Park Service; R. B. Robertson, Union Pacific Railroad; *Major Julian Boyd, Superintendent of the Ryan operations; Wash Cahill, Superintendent of the* Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad; *and Frank Jenifer, President of the Pacific Coast Borax Company. The man in the old borax wagon is Horace M. Albright, then Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park.*

Foreword

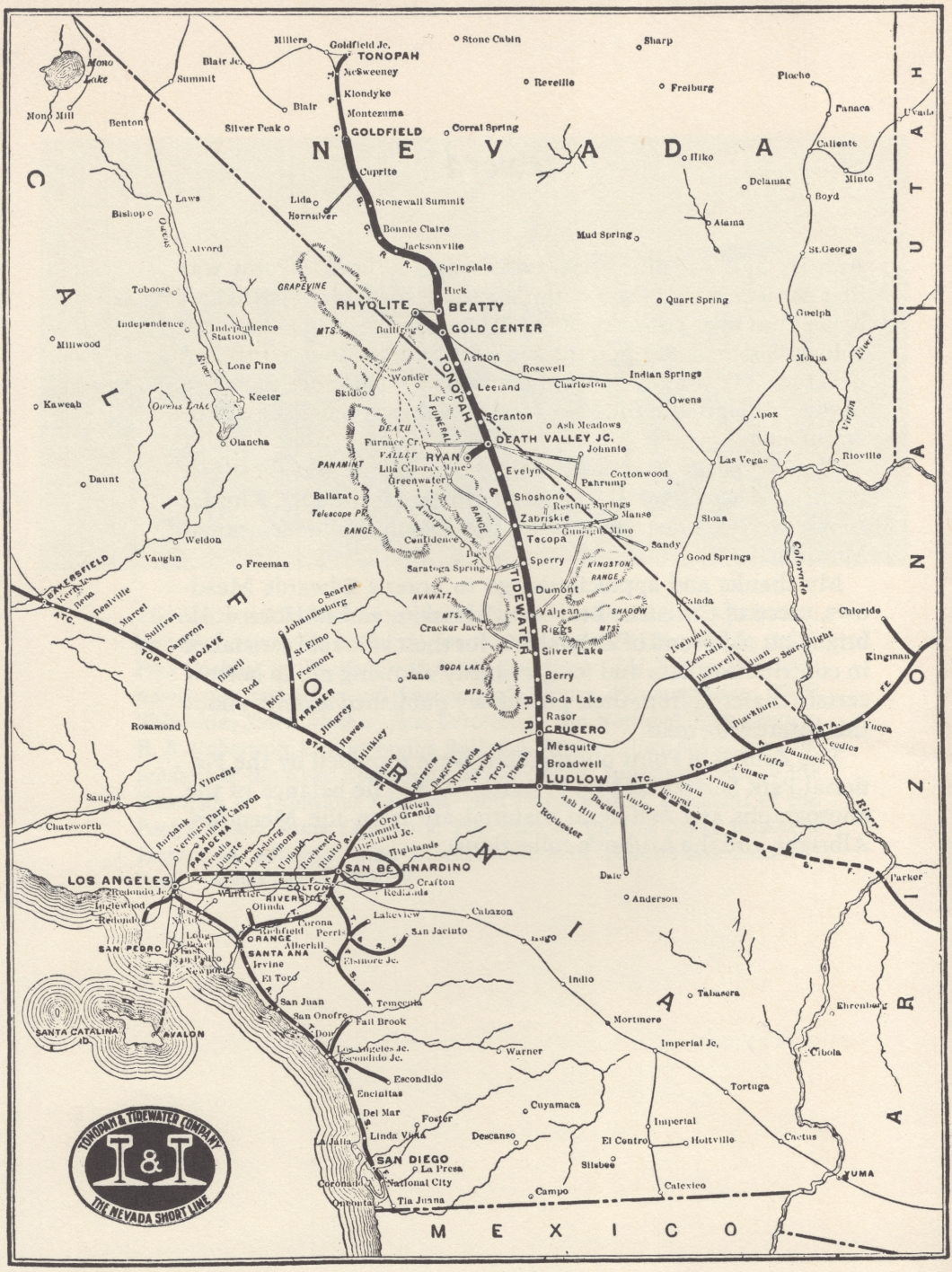
ALMOST half a century has passed since Zabriskie Point was first named. In that time, countless thousands have visited and looked out over Zabriskie Point. They have seen the changing colors, watched the play of sunlight and shadow across the badlands, viewed the Valley floor with the shimmering white of the Salt Flats and the kaleidoscope vista on the distant Panamint Range.

This Keepsake is about Zabriskie the Point, and the illustrious desert pioneer. It has been printed for the 27th Annual Death Valley Encampment in the Death Valley National Monument.

My thanks and appreciation go to Lorena Edwards Meadows, niece of Christian Brevoort Zabriskie; and to Horace Albright, an old friend of Zabriskie's, for their valuable assistance in contributing data and for graciously allowing me to borrow certain material from their previously published articles about this interesting man.

The Zabriskie Point photographs were provided by the National Park Service and Ed P. Jones FAIA. The balance of the photographs and collateral material are from the Meadows, Albright, and the Author's collections.

HUGH C. TOLFORD



Map of the Tonopah & Tidewater R.R. completed in 1907 and showing Zabriskie station.

Zabriskie

THE PLACE

EARLY MAPS of the American West or California sometimes omitted any reference at all to Death Valley and its place names. It was not until the late 1920s that now-familiar names such as Devil's Golf Course, Devil's Corn Field, Texas Spring, Nevares, Artist's Palette, Manly Beacon, Dante's View, and the most visited scenic place of all — Zabriskie Point — were named.

The opening of Death Valley to tourists signalled the beginning of a new era and was the principal reason for the sudden flood of new place names for these scenic sites. Early in 1926 the Pacific Coast Borax Company finalized its plans to develop tourist business in Death Valley. A subsidiary company, the Death Valley Hotel Company, converted former bunk houses at Death Valley Junction into the Armagosta Hotel. The original cottages for company personnel at the former mining camp of Ryan were changed to overnight visitor accommodations as the Death Valley View Hotel. On a knoll adjacent to Furnace Creek Wash, 178 feet below sea level and a mile east of Furnace Creek Ranch, The Furnace Creek Inn was completed in February, 1927.

Transportation for visitors was provided by the company-owned *Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad,* connecting with the Union Pacific at Crucero, California. Remote Death Valley could now be easily reached by Pullman car travelers from any part of the country in perfect comfort.

Arriving at Death Valley Junction via the *Tonopah & Tidewater,* the tourists were transported via the narrow gauge *Death Valley Railroad* to Ryan for an overnight stay. The following morning, they piled aboard open touring cars for a scenic drive from the 3,000 foot elevation to sea level for a stay at the new Furnace Creek Inn. The next day, the cars carried delighted visitors to scenic spots around the Valley.

The first Death Valley tourist literature, published in time for the 1927-28 winter season opening, showed a few place names. By the time the next two seasons rolled around, advertising brochures included many new place names for the first time — including Zabriskie Point.

Zabriskie Point got its name in the fall of 1927 after Harry Gower, resident engineer of the Pacific Coast Borax Company, with the sanction of Major Boyd, Superintendent of Ryan operations, spent company funds on a new road in lieu of annual assessment work on some nearby mining claims in what is now known as Gower Gulch. After the road was completed Gower stood on the knoll at the top of the road and decided that this magnificent badlands area should be called Zabriskie Point in honor of the spirited Vice-president and General Manager of the Company, Chris Zabriskie.

The location was first described in the Death Valley Hotel Company's advertising literature as the "center of unearthly desolation. . . . Drive up along the ridge to Zabriskie Point, a pinnacle right in the heart of the weird plantless ranges."

The Death Valley Guidebook, published in 1939, described the Point as follows:

> Rows of deeply folded yellow hills spread toward the nearby Black Mountains and fall away toward Death Valley. In Tertiary times, the land forming these hills was a lake bed; it was long ago lifted and folded into the present form by violent earth movements. The sharp, golden peak (right) is Manly Beacon.

After nearly 42 years of giving much enjoyment to Death Valley visitors, notoriety of dubious value came to Zabriskie Point. Carlos Ponti Productions, and M.G.M., with great fanfare, announced that an agreement had been concluded with the noted Italian director, Michelangelo Antonioni, to film a new motion picture whose locale would be set in Death Valley.

Early in February, 1970, after a lengthy publicity build-up, movie critics previewed showings of the film, entitled *Zabriskie Point,* and learned that the story revolved around some student revolutionaries and their escapades which culminated with some rather controversial scenes filmed on the site. Re-

Lost wagon north of Death Valley sand dunes. Wagon now at Stove Pipe Wells resort.

Once again, Chris Zabriskie (center) returned to his beloved desert, this time in 1904, possibly in connection with the Tonopah mining boom. Zabriskie, Ben Edwards, his brother-in-law and friend from Candelaria, and Borax Smith, his employer, were now major stockholders in the new West End Mining Company. The other two prospectors are not identified, but the one astride the burro looks very like the famous Borax Smith.

The early morning sun, rising behind the Funeral Mountains, floods portions of Zabriskie Point and the Panamint Range with light. Telescope Peak is visible (farthest distant at left). The floor of Death Valley appears at upper right while the wash at lower center drains run-off water into Golden Canyon.

Afternoon sunlight tends to emphasize the forces of nature which have eroded the sedimentary rocks and Manly Beacon.

It's summer, just after daybreak, and the sharp prong of Manly Beacon rises out of the badlands of Zabriskie Point with the floor of the Valley and the rugged Panamint Range ready for another simmering day in Death Valley.

The late afternoon sun accentuates the barren and tortured contours of Zabriskie Point.

SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE.
PACIFIC BORAX SALT & SODA CO.

PRINCIPAL OFFICE.
ROOMS 11 & 12, 230 MONTGOMERY ST.

Columbus, Nev. Nov 27th 1888.

Friend Hunes;

Again I have a favor to ask of you. I hope I will not try your patience too much. My Father is making an effort to obtain the appointment of Melter and Refiner of the Carson Mint upon Mr Harrison's accession to power. Will you kindly use your influence with your father to have him endeavor to get Senators Jones and Stewart to send in my Father's name for that position. Your Fathers request coupled with other influence that will be brought to bear can, I think, secure the desired appointment.

I hope you are all well. My wife and I are well and happy. She joins me in sending love to Hettie, Warren and Laurence. Believe me

Very Truly Yours
C. B. Rabisdeil.

viewers were consistent in criticizing the film, its story and its actors, except for a few suitable comments about the extremely photogenic Death Valley landscape. One critic said the Death Valley scene reminded him of the remains of a cataclysmic prehistoric oatmeal war. *Time Magazine* commented: "Zabriskie Point is the lowest point in the United States [it is not. The elevation is 710 feet] and this movie is certainly Antonioni's lowest effort."

The Sacramento Grand Jury even got into the act, conducting a full-scale investigation of the goings-on at Zabriskie Point and forwarding its finding to the Justice Department in Washington. In a short while, it all blew over and the movie *Zabriskie Point* quietly and mercifully disappeared from the public scene.

In September, 1975, Zabriskie Point once more made headlines across the country when the officers of Tenneco, Inc., denied via the press and television that they had any plans to open a strip mine there. However, company officials stopped short of guaranteeing that no mining would *ever* take place on the site. Thus, in the 1970s the future of this beautiful and scenic site, enjoyed by millions of visitors since the opening of the area to tourism in 1927 and the subsequent establishment of Death Valley National Monument in 1933, could be in jeopardy.

The morning wash hanging on the clothes line in the foreground, the wisp of smoke rising from the town's only mill, and the single track of the narrow gauge Carson & Colorado Railroad serve to accentuate the bleak and barren location of Chris Zabriskie's home town of Candelaria, Nevada, in the spring of 1893.

By 1914, Chris Zabriskie was Vice-President and General Manager for the giant Pacific Coast Borax Company, the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad, the Bullfrog-Goldfield R.R. and the newly-completed Death Valley Railroad to the mining camp of Ryan, 300 feet above the floor of Death Valley and only 15 miles from Furnace Creek Ranch.

Zabriskie

THE MAN

CHRISTIAN BREVOORT ZABRISKIE, widely known as "Chris," came from a pioneer California and Nevada family whose ancestors were immigrants from Poland and Holland. In 1849, excited by the Gold Rush, his grandfather Dr. C. B. Zabriskie and his father E. B. Zabriskie left New York City and headed for California via the Isthmus of Panama. Although the family came to California seeking their fortunes in the gold fields, nothing is known of where they went or what success they had in mining or other pursuits.

When the Civil War began E. B. Zabriskie was married and living in Nevada. He volunteered for army service in the First Nevada Cavalry which was ordered to Wyoming Territory and assigned to Fort Bridger. Here Christian Brevoort Zabriskie was born October 16, 1864. By now his father was a captain and for a brief period that year was commander of Fort Bridger.

The family lived there until the end of the war when the Nevada unit was transferred to Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City. Chris remembered his later childhood days in the Mormon capital where he attended St. Mark's School and delighted in telling of his playmates, some of whom were children of Brigham Young.

Chris's father left the army late in the 1860s and returned to Carson City, Nevada. Chris attended the local schools and worked at odd jobs on holidays and after school.

The first job he regarded as worthwhile was in the office of the *Virginia & Truckee Railroad.* He liked to tell about one day finding his dog with a can tied to its tail. Sensing it had been put there by a *V&T* worker Chris immediately offered his resignation, telling the management that he did not want to work for a railroad that would abuse a dog!

On March 4, 1882, the first *Carson & Colorado* passenger train rolled into Candelaria, a mining camp founded in 1864

in western Nevada not far from Teel's Borax Marsh near Columbus. Shortly thereafter young Cris Zabriskie, now 18 years old, came to work at the local Esmeralda County Bank. Two years later a slump in the mining fortunes of Candelaria occurred and the bank closed its doors. The stone building, now empty, was deeded to B. G. Smith, brother of Francis Marion ("Borax") Smith, President of the Pacific Coast Borax Company. B. G. Smith opened a general store and later offered banking facilities. Chris was hired to handle the telegraph and express departments and often took on outside jobs such as relief telegrapher for the *C&C Railroad.*

Chris could have been described as a young man "going places." Possessing ambition, resourcefulness, and a magnetic personality, he was quite popular with almost everyone in town, especially the ladies, who liked his courtly manner. He had a good singing voice and was always in demand for a few songs at parties and gatherings. He was also full of fun, liked harmless practical jokes, and occasionally thought up some interesting adventures.

It was here in Candelaria that Chris's life employment pattern would be determined. Borax Smith needed someone to look after his operations at Columbus Marsh. Impressed by the drive and dynamic personality of young Zabriskie, he offered him the job in May of 1885. Soon thereafter, Chris was named superintendent for the borax operations. He also found time to form a new partnership with Walter Shockley, mine operator and banker, to buy the old bank building and set up Zabriskie & Shockley, Bankers and Brokers.

Zabriskie was at first reluctant to take on his new assignmen at Columbus because it was totally devoid of social life. However, he had been courting Margaret Edwards, a school teacher, since 1884 and she finally consented to marry him on September 10, 1888.

In 1890, Borax Smith acquired the defunct William T. Coleman properties including Harmony Borax Works. Chris, as superintendent of Smith's operations, had made several trips into Death Valley, stopping off each time for a few days with Jimmy Dayton at Furnace Creek Ranch. In December, 1892, he was transferred to the Pacific Coast Borax Company's Oak-

land office for administrative and supervisory duties. In 1896 he moved on to New York as a trainee under Joseph W. Mather, who had opened the company's Wall Street office in 1890.

In 1897, Joseph Mather retired and Chris Zabriskie was placed in charge of the New York office, directing the affairs of the company until 1914 when, as Vice-president and General Manager, he assumed leadership of all American operations of the company.

Chris Zabriskie didn't miss the mining boom at Tonopah. Joining his brother-in-law Ben Edwards and his chief Borax Smith, he invested in mining properties there in 1904. He was also a director of a bank and president of a shortline railroad in Bayonne, New Jersey, where his company had a borax refinery.

This versatile man with so many business interests in the West, headquarters in New York City and connections all over the world in the sale and distribution of borax products also enjoyed his spare time. He and his wife Margaret were interested in music and were devoted patrons of the opera and Broadway musicals. The night before the San Francisco earthquake on April 18, 1906, the great Enrico Caruso gave a concert at which Chris Zabriskie and R. C. Baker from London were in attendance. Both registered at the Palace Hotel where they experienced the full force of the great earthquake and witnessed the beginning of the vast destruction by the fire that followed.

Chris was a member of the famed Bohemian Club of San Francisco, sometimes singing at their outings at Bohemian Grove. He and his wife also acquired a retreat on the north shore of Long Island, where he enjoyed golf and sailing during the summer months.

On Sunday, October 24, 1926, Chris Zabriskie, R. C. Baker, and Pacific Coast Borax officials arrived at Death Valley Junction for their first conference with representatives from the *Union Pacific Railroad.* The topic for discussion was a plan to open Death Valley to tourists. A second meeting was scheduled in January, 1927, this time between officials from the National Park Service, the Pacific Coast Borax Company, and the *Union Pacific* to explore the feasibility of working toward

National Park status for Death Valley and providing more transportation and visitor accommodations. Chris Zabriskie was only too happy to make this second trip from New York in order to visit Death Valley.

One of those in attendance at this meeting was Horace Albright, a dean of American conservationists. Mr. Albright became the second Director of our National Park Service in 1929 and participated in the preparation of the proclamation signed by President Hoover on February 11, 1933, creating Death Valley National Monument.

Albright remembers Chris Zabriskie as a man of deep and abiding sentiment who loved old friends, old places of his youth, young manhood, old songs, his family and his business associates, who described him as an irresistible salesman.

Great things took place during his career with the Pacific Coast Borax Company. Among them were the building of the *Tonopah & Tidewater* and the *Death Valley* railroads, the opening of new mines and plants at old and new Ryan in the Death Valley region, launching of tourism and construction of the Furnace Creek Inn in Death Valley, acquisition and development of the currently operating mine at Boron, building the Wilmington refinery, opening of branch sales offices, successful explorations for borax deposits, potash and other chemical operations at Borosolvay during World War I, study of the potash discovery at Carlsbad, New Mexico, subsequent development of its mine and refinery and many others.

In later years Chris Zabriskie was troubled by arthritis and his wife's illness drew heavily on his vitality. After his wife passed away in 1932 and was buried in Carson City, Nevada, he continued to live at their Port Jefferson home, commuting occasionally to his office in New York. In 1933, following an acute attack of arthritis, he asked for retirement after 36 years of service.

When Borax Smith's real estate empire failed, the British took over control of the United States operations of the company in 1914. It would be a long time before an American was again President of the company. Richard C. Baker of London retained the office of President until the death of Frank Jenifer in 1950 when James M. Gerstley, a naturalized citizen from England, was made President.

On February 8, 1936, Christian Brevoort Zabriskie passed away in a hospital at Port Jefferson and was lated buried at Carson City beside his wife. Their daughter Zayda died in 1956 and was taken to Carson City to rest with her parents.

Chris Zabriskie had experienced the excitement of a remote mining camp. He had been there as the legendary Borax Smith created his empire. He travelled Death Valley before most of the others. He built railroads through the deserts, planned and completed visitor accommodations for Death Valley, and guided his company to a giant in its field. Warm, friendly and gregarious . . . energetic, resourceful and high-spirited . . . his eyes never failed to light up and his small frame leaned forward eagerly whenever someone mentioned Fort Bridger, the borax fields at Columbus, the mining camp of Candelaria, or his favorite place of all — Death Valley.

His old friend, Horace Albright says it well:

In the Death Valley National Monument is Zabriskie Point, one of the most spectacular and colorful natural features. From it you get a beautiful panoramic view of the valley, especially when the sun's rays bring out the lights, shadows and spectrum of color in the rocks.

Certainly no man loved Death Valley more than Chris Zabriskie and it is fitting that this outstanding scenic point will always bear his name.

Chris Zabriskie (left) and Horace Albright posed for this photo in New Rochelle, N.Y., in 1935, a year before Zabriskie's death.

This map of Death Valley's scenic attractions appeared in the advertising brochures for the 1928 tourist season and was the first to show Zabriskie Point as a place name.

Printed in the United States of America by Grant Dahlstrom at the Castle Press, Pasadena, California

Joseph W. Mather's son, Stephen, joined his father in 1893 and it was he who worked out the original twenty-mule team design and had it copyrighted. Steve was destined to become a founder and the first Director of the Natianal Park Service in 1917.